



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

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Office of the General Counsel

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June 15, 2009

The Honorable Michael J. Copps
Acting Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 Twelfth Street, S.W.
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairman Copps:

Re: In the Matter of *The United States Department of Health and Human Services Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration Petition for Permanent Reassignment of Three Toll Free Suicide Prevention Hotline Numbers, in Toll Free Service Access Codes*, CC Docket No. 95-155, CC Docket No. 07-271

This letter is filed on behalf of the United States Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), in order to update the record, and to renew the request that the Federal Communications Commission (the "Commission") permanently reassign three toll-free suicide prevention hotline numbers^{1/} to SAMHSA.^{2/}

On May 13, 2009, HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius and Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Secretary Eric K. Shinseki, co-signed a letter (Enclosure A) to the Commission requesting the permanent reassignment of the toll free hotline number 1-800-SUICIDE to SAMHSA. That request was made in order to support the crisis intervention services and assistance to veterans and their families currently offered by HHS and the VA through a special service of the National

¹ The toll-free numbers 1-800-SUICIDE (1-800-784-2433), 1-888-SUICIDE (1-888-784-2433), and 1-877-SUICIDA (1-877-784-2432) are referred to collectively as "the suicide prevention hotlines."

² See, *Toll Free Service Access Codes*, CC Docket No. 95-155, Order DA 07-130, January 22, 2007, reassigning three toll-free numbers (1-800-784-2433, 1-888-784-2433, 1-877-2432) to SAMHSA for a period of one year. The Commission has ordered several extensions of that temporary assignment which is currently in effect until August 14, 2009. See, *Toll Free Service Access Codes*, CC Docket No. 95-155: Order DA 07-5003, December 20, 2007; Order DA 08-915, April 18, 2008; Order DA 08-1678, July 17, 2008; Order DA 08-2517, November 14, 2008; Order DA 09-1072, May 14, 2009.

Suicide Prevention Lifeline (Lifeline).^{3/} SAMHSA funds the Lifeline, which operates several toll-free hotline numbers connecting callers in crisis to a network of over 130 crisis centers located around the country.^{4/}

In support of the request made by HHS Secretary Sebelius and VA Secretary Shinseki, SAMHSA submits an updated chart (Enclosure B) showing the number of calls to SAMHSA's National Suicide Prevention Lifeline network answered by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Hotline. This chart shows the usage of that toll-free number by callers seeking assistance for or on behalf of veterans, and reflects increased demand for crisis counseling and assistance to veterans.

As a public health agency created by Congress to address the mental health needs of the public, SAMHSA reviews, monitors, and analyzes trends that affect those mental and behavioral health needs. In furtherance of these goals, and to maintain the quality of services to callers in crisis SAMHSA reviews call volume and patterns for calls to the Lifeline. The enclosed chart (Enclosure C) presents the number of answered calls to the Lifeline through May 2009, and shows that more than 54,000 calls were made to the Lifeline during the month of May 2009. According to SAMHSA, this is the highest number of monthly calls ever received in the history of the Lifeline.

SAMHSA is dedicated to the goals of addressing public health and public safety, including meeting the challenges that have arisen in response to the Nation's current economic condition. On May 8, 2009, SAMHSA submitted a chart showing the number of callers to the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline who identify themselves as experiencing financial distress.

³ In July 2007, the Department of Veterans Affairs established a Veterans Suicide Prevention Hotline using the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline number (1-800-273-TALK) as the access point for the VA Suicide Prevention Crisis Center in Canandaigua, New York. This Hotline connects veterans at risk for suicide to critical VA services across the country, including suicide prevention coordinators in every VA medical center nationwide. Since SAMHSA has operated the number 1-800-SUICIDE, callers to that toll-free number who identify themselves as veterans or their families are directly connected to the VA Crisis Center. According to figures compiled by SAMHSA, during the first five months of 2009, call volume to the VA Crisis Center reached more than 330 calls daily; approximately one quarter of these callers dialed 1-800-SUICIDE for veterans assistance.

⁴ The mission of the Lifeline is to prevent suicide by reaching and effectively serving all persons at suicidal risk in the United States through a network of crisis hotlines. The Lifeline is a network that links more than 130 independent crisis call centers nationwide using a series of toll-free numbers. When callers dial these toll-free numbers at any time from anywhere in the United States, they are routed to the nearest networked center, where helpers are trained to provide emotional support, assessment, crisis intervention and/or linkages to necessary community resources. The Lifeline is currently operated by SAMHSA and the Link2Health Solutions, Inc. under a cooperative agreement awarded in 2007. Since the FCC temporarily reassigned the three toll-free suicide prevention hotlines to SAMHSA, these numbers have been integrated into the Lifeline network.

Consistently, Lifeline's data show that between 20-30% of callers describe economic/financial concerns as a reason for the call to the Lifeline.^{5/}

Further, the Executive Office of the President uses the Lifeline to assist individuals who contact the White House seeking urgent assistance and expressing thoughts of suicide for themselves or a loved one. According to SAMHSA's Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS), SAMHSA currently receives up to 30 such inquiries every week which are referred to the Lifeline for appropriate follow up and assistance.

SAMHSA's commitment to maintaining public access to the network of suicide prevention hotlines remains strong and constant. Since the Commission exercised its discretion to direct the allocation of toll-free numbers by temporarily reassigning the suicide prevention numbers to SAMHSA in January 2007, the number of callers has expanded regularly. The services offered by crisis centers have been enhanced and additional services to the public have been added. Specialized services have been offered for veterans and utilized to the benefit of veterans and their families. SAMHSA has taken these measures consistent with its mission to address the public health and mental health needs of individuals, in support of suicide prevention activities nationwide, and in recognition of the benefit to public safety achieved by maintaining open access to toll-free hotlines linking callers to crisis counseling and intervention services.

HHS maintains that the three toll-free numbers used as suicide prevention hotlines are a unique resource, to which public access and service must be maintained to promote and protect public health and public safety. The fact that these toll-free numbers provide access to a network of suicide prevention hotlines requires that they be administered in a manner that provides a strong operational base, staff with professional skills, advanced technological ability, and timely responsiveness to ensure that the networked centers can effectively and efficiently address the needs of individuals in crisis. It is critical that the services provided by the network not be imperiled by questions of financial soundness, dropped calls, or any other barrier affecting the network's ability to support and assist callers in suicidal crisis.

As a result of the foregoing, SAMHSA respectfully requests that the Commission grant the request for permanent reassignment of the three toll-free suicide prevention hotline numbers to SAMHSA.

⁵ Letter from SAMHSA dated May 8, 2009, In the Matter of *The United States Department of Health and Human Services Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration Petition for Permanent Reassignment of Three Toll Free Suicide Prevention Hotline Numbers*, in *Toll Free Service Access Codes*, CC Docket No. 95-155, CC Docket No. 07-271.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rina Hakimian', written over a horizontal line.

Rina Hakimian
Senior Attorney

cc: Commissioner Jonathan S. Adelstein
Commissioner Robert M. McDowell
Julie A. Veach, Acting Bureau Chief
Randy Clarke, Legal Counsel to the Bureau Chief
Ann Stevens, Wireline Competition Bureau
Heather Hendrickson, Wireline Competition Bureau
Michelle Sclater, Wireline Competition Bureau

Enclosures (A-C)



MAY 13 2009

The Honorable Michael J. Copps
Acting Chairman, Federal Communications Commission
445 Twelfth Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20554

Dear Mr. Copps:

We are writing to request that 1-800-SUICIDE be permanently reassigned to the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

SAMHSA provides a stable source of funding for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (Lifeline), a telephone counseling network linking over 135 suicide prevention hotlines nationwide through a system of toll free numbers. The Lifeline network (1-800-273-TALK), which is operated by a SAMHSA grantee, currently answers over 48,700 calls monthly.

Among the services offered is the Veterans Suicide Prevention Hotline, launched in July 2007 by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and HHS. Veterans who call the Lifeline and "press 1" are directly connected to the VA's suicide prevention services. Approximately 8,600 callers press 1 for VA services each month.

After the temporary assignment by the FCC of 1-800-SUICIDE to SAMHSA in January 2007, SAMHSA integrated calls to that number into the Lifeline network. Approximately 19,300 calls per month, including 2,200 VA calls per month, currently enter the Lifeline network through 1-800-SUICIDE. If 1-800-SUICIDE does not remain with SAMHSA as part of the Lifeline network, the safety of those callers seeking veterans services and using 1-800-SUICIDE could be jeopardized.

HHS and the VA seek permanent reassignment to SAMHSA of 1-800-SUICIDE so that we can continue providing our Nation's citizens including our veterans the consistent high quality of service they deserve.

Sincerely,

General Eric K. Shinseki
Secretary
Department of
Veterans Affairs

Kathleen Sebelius
Secretary
Department of
Health and Human Services

ENCLOSURE A

**National Suicide Prevention Lifeline Calls Answered at the U.S. Department of
Veterans Affairs Suicide Prevention Hotline in Canandaigua, New York**

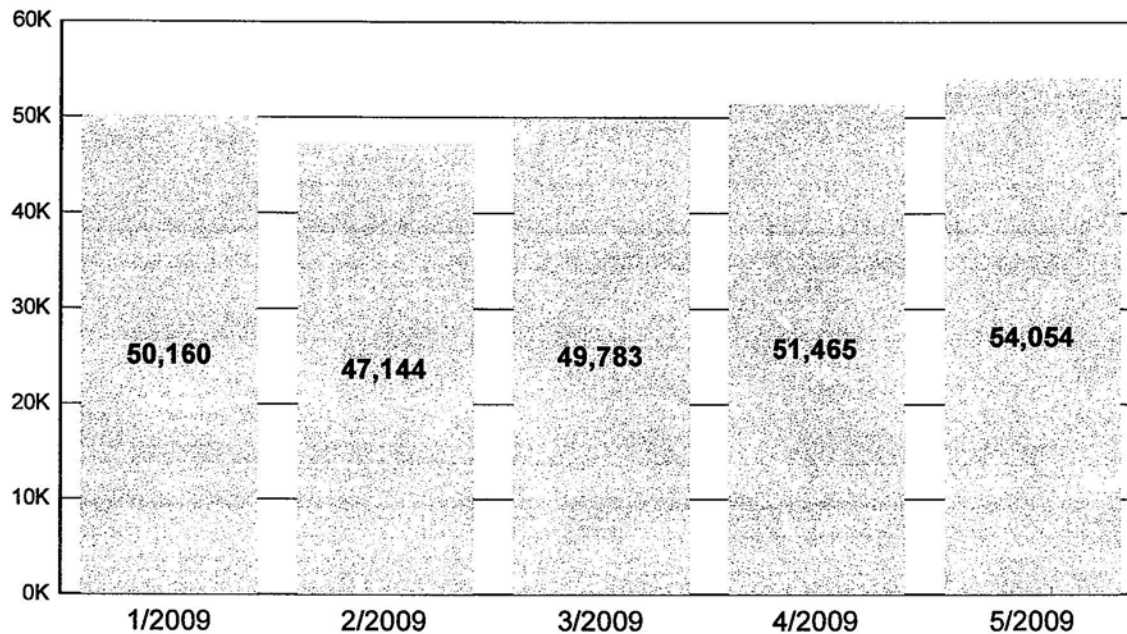
Month	Total calls	Identified as Veterans	Family or Friend of Veteran	Referrals to VA Suicide Prevention Coordinator	Emergency Rescues	Active Duty Military Calls
March 2009	9,296	5,384	706	947	245	156
April 2009	10,213	5,468	716	1,058	277	134
May 2009	11,437	5,943	666	1,231	316	115

Table prepared by SAMHSA/CMHS. Data courtesy of U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.
(6/2009)

ENCLOSURE B

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:
Monthly Year-to-Date Report through 5/31/2009

I. Answered calls per month to Lifeline year-to-date.



	Total	800-273-TALK	800-SUICIDE	Others
Total	252,606	149,967	98,473	4,166
1/2009	50,160	29,446	20,262	452
2/2009	47,144	26,660	18,100	2,384
3/2009	49,783	29,607	19,601	575
4/2009	51,465	31,536	19,531	398
5/2009	54,054	32,718	20,979	357

Average monthly call volume = 50,521.20
Average daily call volume = 1,672.89
Percentage of change since January 2008 = +7.7%

Note: "Others" includes Lifeline's TTY line (800-799-4889), Spanish Lifeline (888-628-9454) and 877-SUICIDA (877-784-2432).

ENCLOSURE C